

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Bird-Building Collisions

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

I was recently passing through Atlanta with a friend, who happens to be a bird biologist, and an avid recreational birder. It was her first time in the city, and as we approached it along the interstate, she looked up at skyscraper after skyscraper, most covered with glass, and she exclaimed simply, "I'll bet a lot of birds die here."

I imagine we've all been near when a bird flew into a large window. Hopefully the stunned bird was able to shake it off and continue, but building collisions kills lots of birds each year. Lots.

Researchers with the Smithsonian Institution and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service have teased through published scientific literature and unpublished datasets and based on 23 studies, they estimate bird-building collision deaths to be between 365 and 988 million birds annually in the United States.

As to be expected, the bird species most commonly reported from building kills are also common birds. However, disturbing is those birds which are at-risk and seem to have high vulnerability to building collisions. These include golden-winged warbler for buildings of all sizes, field sparrows for residence-sized buildings, and Eastern whip-poor-wills for high-rises.

The researchers cautions that the studies they examined mostly took place during the migration season and in the eastern United States, which does instill a geographic and seasonal bias to their findings.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.